

A Respectable Woman by Kate Chopin

Summary, Questions and Answers

Class 12 English

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Summary

The story follows Mrs. Baroda, a respectable married woman who experiences an unexpected inner conflict after meeting her husband Gaston's close friend, Gouvernail.

After spending the winter in New Orleans, Mrs. Baroda looks forward to peaceful days alone with her husband at their sugar plantation. However, Gaston invites Gouvernail to stay with them for a week or two. Before meeting him, Mrs. Baroda imagines him as a tall, cynical man with eyeglasses, but she soon discovers that he is quiet, polite, and different from what she expected.

Although Gouvernail makes no effort to impress her, Mrs. Baroda gradually feels attracted to him. His calm nature and mysterious silence confuse her, and she struggles to understand her growing emotions. She tries to become friendly with him, but his reserved personality makes her even more restless.

One evening, while sitting alone outside, she meets Gouvernail. As he speaks softly about life and peaceful living, she suddenly feels a strong desire to touch him. Realizing that these feelings conflict with her identity as a respectable married woman, she immediately walks away.

Unable to explain her emotions, Mrs. Baroda leaves for the city the next morning and returns only after Gouvernail has gone. Surprisingly, before the following year ends, she herself suggests inviting Gouvernail again. The story ends with an open ending, leaving readers to wonder whether she has truly overcome her feelings or simply learned to control them.

Important Themes

Inner Conflict

Mrs. Baroda struggles between her personal desires and her moral responsibilities as a married woman.

Respectability and Social Expectations

The story explores how society's expectations influence a person's decisions and emotions.

Temptation

Mrs. Baroda experiences an unexpected attraction that tests her self control.

Appearance versus Reality

Gouvernail turns out to be very different from the image Mrs. Baroda had created before meeting him.

Unspoken Emotions

Many important feelings remain hidden throughout the story, creating emotional tension.

Character Information

Mrs. Baroda

Mrs. Baroda is the central character of the story. She is intelligent, respectable, and devoted to her husband. Her unexpected attraction towards Gouvernail creates a deep emotional conflict, but she chooses to control her feelings instead of acting on them.

Gaston Baroda

Gaston is Mrs. Baroda's husband. He is friendly, talkative, and trusting. He respects his friend Gouvernail and does not understand why his wife reacts strangely towards him.

Gouvernail

Gouvernail is Gaston's old college friend and a journalist. He is quiet, thoughtful, polite, and reserved. His calm personality unexpectedly attracts Mrs. Baroda, even though he never intentionally tries to impress her.

Important Events

Gaston invites Gouvernail to the plantation.

Mrs. Baroda becomes disappointed because she wanted private time with

her husband.

Mrs. Baroda meets Gouvernail.

She discovers that he is very different from her expectations.

She develops unexpected feelings.

His quiet personality creates emotional confusion within her.

The night conversation.

While talking with Gouvernail, she suddenly feels attracted to him but controls herself.

Mrs. Baroda leaves for the city.

She decides to distance herself until Gouvernail leaves.

The surprising ending.

Later, she herself suggests inviting Gouvernail again.

Difficult Vocabulary

Tete a tete: A private conversation between two people.

Cynical: Believing that people act mainly for selfish reasons.

Portico: A covered entrance supported by columns.

Velvety: Soft and smooth.

Piqued: Slightly irritated or offended.

Batture: Land beside a river formed by soil deposits.

Cravat: A piece of cloth worn around the neck.

Temptation: A desire to do something that may be wrong.

Strenuous: Requiring great effort.

Hospitality: Friendly treatment of guests.

Key Message / Main Idea

The story shows that human emotions can sometimes conflict with social expectations and personal values. Mrs. Baroda's struggle teaches that self control, responsibility, and moral choices often become difficult when unexpected feelings arise.

Textbook Exercise & Answers

Understanding the text

a. Why was Mrs. Baroda not happy with the information about Gouvernail's visit to their farm?

Mrs. Baroda was unhappy because she had been looking forward to spending peaceful time alone with her husband after a busy winter. Gouvernail's visit interrupted those plans.

b. How was Gouvernail different from Mrs. Baroda's thinking?

Mrs. Baroda imagined Gouvernail as a tall, cynical man with eyeglasses. When she met him, she found that he was slim but neither very tall nor cynical. He was polite, quiet, and much more pleasant than she had expected.

c. How does Mrs. Baroda compare the guest Gouvernail with her husband?

She notices that Gaston is friendly, frank, and talkative, while Gouvernail is quiet, reserved, and thoughtful. His silence makes him seem mysterious to her.

d. Why and how did Mrs. Baroda attempt to change Gouvernail's solitary habits?

She wanted him to become more open and sociable. She tried to spend time with him, joined him on walks, and started conversations in the hope of making him more comfortable.

e. How does Gaston not agree with his wife on Gouvernail's character?

Gaston believes Gouvernail is an intelligent, respectable, and kind person who simply enjoys peace and quiet. He thinks his wife has misunderstood his friend's personality.

f. Why is Gaston surprised by his wife's expression towards the end of the story?

Gaston is surprised because Mrs. Baroda, who had previously wanted Gouvernail to leave, later suggests inviting him again. He never expected such a sudden change in her attitude.

Reference to the context

a. What is the reason for conflict in Mrs. Baroda's mind? What role does Mrs. Baroda being a respectable woman play in this story?

Mrs. Baroda's conflict begins when she unexpectedly becomes attracted to Gouvernail. Her feelings clash with her role as a married woman and with society's expectations of respectability.

Instead of acting on her emotions, she controls herself because she believes that a respectable woman should remain faithful and protect her dignity. Her decision to leave for the city shows that she chooses responsibility over temptation.

b. Sketch the character of Gouvernail and contrast it with Gaston.

Gouvernail is a quiet, thoughtful, and polite journalist who prefers calm surroundings and speaks only when necessary. He never demands attention and remains gentle throughout his stay.

Gaston is more outgoing, cheerful, and talkative. He enjoys conversation and easily connects with people. While Gouvernail appears introverted and reflective, Gaston seems more expressive and sociable.

c. Why does Mrs. Baroda not disclose her feelings towards Gouvernail to her husband?

Mrs. Baroda keeps her feelings secret because she realizes that revealing them could damage both her marriage and the friendship between Gaston and Gouvernail. She also believes that such emotions are inappropriate for a respectable married woman.

d. The last three sentences of the story bring a kind of twist. After reading these three sentences, how do you analyze Mrs. Baroda's attitude towards Gouvernail?

The ending creates uncertainty about Mrs. Baroda's true feelings. Her decision to invite Gouvernail again suggests that something has changed within her.

One possible interpretation is that she has finally overcome her attraction and feels confident enough to meet him without emotional conflict. Another interpretation is that she has stopped resisting her feelings and is willing to face them. Kate Chopin leaves this question unanswered, allowing readers to decide for themselves.

Reference beyond the text

a. The entry of an outsider into a family has been a recurring subject in both literature and movies. Narrate a story where an outsider's arrival destroys the intimate relationship between the husband and wife without anyone's direct fault.

Anton Chekhov's story *About Love* presents a similar situation. Alyohin gradually becomes emotionally attached to Anna Luganovich, who is already married. Neither of them intentionally tries to destroy the marriage, but their growing feelings create emotional distance within the

family.

Anna suffers greatly because she cannot openly express her emotions, while Alyohin also struggles with his conscience. Eventually, both are forced to separate, showing how an outsider's presence can change relationships without anyone deliberately causing harm.

b. Suppose your family members are giving you pressure to get married. Write about the qualities you would like in your future husband or wife.

Marriage is one of the most important decisions in life, so choosing the right partner requires careful thought. I would want someone who is kind, respectful, honest, and understanding. Good communication would be essential because it helps solve problems peacefully.

I would also value responsibility, emotional maturity, and a willingness to support both family and personal goals. A good sense of humour and mutual trust would strengthen the relationship, while respect for each other's families and opinions would create a healthy and lasting marriage.

Simple Question Explanations

Why does Mrs. Baroda leave for the city?

She leaves because she wants to escape the emotional confusion caused by her unexpected attraction towards Gouvernail.

Why is Gouvernail important in the story?

His quiet personality creates the inner conflict that drives the entire story.

What makes the ending special?

The ending remains open because readers cannot be completely certain whether Mrs. Baroda has conquered her feelings or simply learned to hide them.

Important Lines / Passages

"I have overcome everything."

This line is important because it creates the story's final twist. Readers are left wondering whether Mrs. Baroda has truly overcome her attraction or is preparing to face it differently.

Mrs. Baroda's desire to touch Gouvernail

This moment reveals the strongest point of her emotional struggle and highlights the conflict between desire and respectability.

Exam Focused Questions

1. How does Kate Chopin present inner conflict in *A Respectable Woman*?

Kate Chopin presents inner conflict through Mrs. Baroda's struggle between her attraction towards Gouvernail and her sense of moral responsibility.

2. Why is Gouvernail considered a mysterious character?

His quiet nature, limited conversation, and calm behaviour make him mysterious in Mrs. Baroda's eyes.

3. How does the story explore respectability?

The story shows how social expectations influence Mrs. Baroda's decisions and prevent her from acting on her feelings.

4. Why is the ending considered ambiguous?

The ending does not clearly reveal whether Mrs. Baroda has defeated her emotions or accepted them, allowing different interpretations.

5. Compare Gaston and Gouvernail.

Gaston is friendly, talkative, and expressive, while Gouvernail is quiet, thoughtful, and reserved.

Commonly Confusing Points

Did Gouvernail intentionally try to attract Mrs. Baroda?

No. The story never suggests that Gouvernail deliberately tries to impress or attract her.

Why is Mrs. Baroda called a respectable woman?

She values her dignity, marriage, and social reputation, and she controls

her feelings even during emotional conflict.

Does the story clearly reveal Mrs. Baroda's final decision?

No. Kate Chopin intentionally leaves the ending open to different interpretations.

Quick Revision

Author: Kate Chopin

Genre: Short Story

Main Character: Mrs. Baroda

Setting: A sugar plantation after the winter season.

Beginning: Mrs. Baroda becomes disappointed when Gouvernail visits.

Conflict: She unexpectedly becomes attracted to him.

Turning Point: Their quiet conversation makes her realize the strength of her feelings.

Resolution: She leaves for the city and later surprisingly invites him again.

Main Themes: Inner conflict, respectability, temptation, social expectations, appearance versus reality.

Key Lesson: Personal emotions can conflict with social values, and difficult situations often require self control and thoughtful decisions.

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